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Letter dated 8 April 2004 from the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you the Chairman's summary of the International Forum on Partnerships for Sustainable Development, which was held in Rome from 4 to 6 March 2004 (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, under item 3 of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) Marcello **Spatafora**
Ambassador

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INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

4-6 March 2004
Rome, Italy

Chairman's Summary

1. The International Forum on Partnerships for Sustainable Development was convened in Rome, Italy from 4 to 6 March 2004. The Forum was organized by the Italian Ministry for the Environment and Territory, in cooperation with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA).

2. Italy's Minister for the Environment and Territory, H.E. Mr. Altero Matteoli, chaired the Forum, except for the closing session which was chaired by Mr. Corrado Clini, Director General of the Ministry for the Environment and Territory. The Forum was open to all stakeholders involved or interested in partnership initiatives. A total of 700 representatives from governments, intergovernmental organizations, civil society and private sector participated.

3. The meeting's purpose was to generate dialogue on ways to enhance the contribution of partnerships towards the implementation of sustainable development goals and objectives, particularly those related to the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), and other international agreements related to sustainable development.

4. The World Summit on Sustainable Development gave formal recognition to partnerships as an important tool that contribute to and enhance implementation of sustainable development goals. Such initiatives were part of the action-oriented outcome of the Summit.

5. More than 200 partnerships were launched during the Summit process, and more continue to be launched in the follow-up. These partnerships constitute a major step in making sustainable development everyone's business.

There is a whole range of collaborative relationships that have been called partnerships: these range from consortia to networks, from local to international, from formalized arrangements to looser informal structures. Some initiatives are working on advocacy and mobilization of public opinion through knowledge generation and access to information. Others are involved in developing tools and technological solutions to specific natural resource problems. But above all, partnerships represent a way for governments, civil society and the

private sector to pool their energy and resources in tackling difficult economic, social and environmental problems.

The challenge of pursuing sustainable development in an increasingly interdependent globalizing world requires actions, resources and expertise that governments alone may not be able to muster. There is a need for broader development partnerships and investments in which sustainable development is an organizing principle.

6. Partnerships have been heralded as a major innovation and instrument to help achieve equity in a multi-lateral system. At the same time, there is growing interest in determining the added-value that voluntary, multi-stakeholder partnership initiatives contribute to the implementation of sustainable development goals. This has raised concerns on the need for greater credibility, responsibility, transparency, accountability and tangible results in these initiatives.

7. The Forum addressed some of these concerns through the detailed discussions of partnerships for sustainable development held in the following different thematic sessions:

a) Partnerships for sustainable development as model of technology transfer and use of innovative financial mechanisms, facilitated by H.E. Paula Dobriansky, Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs, U.S. Department of State;

b) The added value of partnerships in the global strategy of sustainable development: equal opportunities, equal responsibilities, facilitated by H.E. Minister Elliot Morley, Ministry for Environment, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, United Kingdom;

c) Improving the credibility of partnerships: transparency and accountability, chaired by Paolo Soprano, Director of the Ministry for the Environment and Territory, Italy;

d) Water and sanitation, human settlements, facilitated by Ken Caplan, Director, Building Partnership for Development in Water and Sanitation;

e) Agriculture, rural development, desertification, facilitated by Eve Crowley, Task Manager FAO - Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development Initiative (SARD);

f) Air quality, climate change and transport, facilitated by Fabrizio D'Adda, Director HSE, Eni s.p.a;

g) Energy efficiency and renewable energy, facilitated by Corrado Clini, Director General, Italian Ministry for the Environment and Territory;

h) Forests, biodiversity, mountains, facilitated by Frits Schlingemann, Director and Regional Representative UNEP Regional Office for Europe;

i) Oceans and seas, marine resources, small islands developing states, disaster management, facilitated by H.E. Mr. Jagdish Koonjul, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Mauritius to the UN.

8. Partnerships have been heralded by many as a major innovation and instrument to help achieve equity in a multi-lateral system.

But above all, partnerships represent a way for governments, civil society and the private sector to pool their energy and resources in tackling difficult environmental, social and economic problems.

9. The key issues of the Forum discussions can be summarized under three major questions that were posed :

1) Are partnerships recognized as an essential tool towards achieving sustainable development?

2) What are the elements that make a partnership successful?

3) How can we foster the development of new successful partnerships in the future?

1) Are partnerships recognized as an essential tool towards achieving sustainable development?

- Compared to most stand-alone political processes, partnership initiatives can add value to sustainable development efforts by increasing the involvement of stakeholders at all levels, by increasing participation of sectoral experts and by their capacity to address goals such as poverty reduction, environmental protection and social development using a synergistic approach.

- Partnership initiatives present an opportunity to combine interests and resources where a single government cannot go alone. For example, sustainable development initiatives in the water sector are particularly challenging given that water management is often a trans-boundary issue.

- It has been recognized, that partnership initiatives do not substitute for multilateral processes, but nevertheless they are an important component of the international dialogue on sustainable development.

- At this point in time, two years after Johannesburg, we can say that some of the innovative elements of partnerships include: safeguarding the right of access to central services (e.g. initiatives on drinking water); mutual respect and mutual benefit; better governance; increasing communication between actors; implementation of knowledge at local level and synergies between actions.

2) What are the elements that make a partnership successful?

- It is necessary to guarantee equal participation among partners where individual organizations feel ownership over their collaborative initiative, where roles are defined and where information are accessible to all stakeholders.

- Partnerships must have realistic goals, avoid conflict of interests and monitor, measure and report progress in order to be effective and responsible. They should focus in essential areas of development especially access to basic services (water, sanitation, health, energy, transport).

- The role and involvement of the private sector in the decision making process, as well as in the partnership initiatives, must be increased, also considering that the amount of Foreign Direct Investment is higher than the amount of Official Development Assistance.

- An appropriate local institutional framework is also required to improve allocation of existing financial resources, while taking into account local needs, through a bottom-up approach for decision-making.

- Much has been said on the need to have more financial resources but we should also take into account that one goal should be to promote partnerships that implement pay back projects in order to add the crucial concept of self - financing.

- In the spirit of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), partnership initiatives should be developed using the three principles of aid: effectiveness, accountability and local ownership.

- Partnerships should avoid problems of non compliance with Multilateral Environmental Agreements.

- All partners are beneficiaries of the process and contributors to its successful implementation. In this regard, partnerships are promoting a concrete and significant process of international cooperation.

- Partnership should be implemented on the basis of long term feasible and strategic plans.

- Competition between partnerships and partners, as well as competition for resources should be avoided.

3) How can we foster the development of new successful partnerships in the future?

- The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) could discuss a recommendation to promote successful partnership initiatives, evaluate how to proceed in the future and how to use them to contribute to the implementation of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The CSD Partnerships Database can be used as a reference tool in this respect, to share good practices and information on partnerships at a global level.

- Partnership initiatives seen to be successful could receive a "Certification for Sustainable Development", as a mean of recognizing accountability, and encouraging their successful replicability in other geographical areas.

- Discussions in the thematic sessions stressed the importance of local authority involvement in partnerships for sustainable development.

- Good communication and timely sharing of information is key to building trust and respect between partners, fostering professionalism, ensuring transparency and achieving synergies among diverse membership. Establishment of an independent convener or secretariat body was one of the ways suggested to assure fair, neutral representation and coordination. Some participants suggested that partnerships should develop formal codes of conduct, while others argued that a looser informal structure allowed for greater innovation.

- Greater engagement of the financial sector, especially banks is considered necessary, while at the same time recognizing that there are obstacles to their involvement especially in the water and sanitation sectors in countries where investments carry high risks.

- The partnership initiatives launched in Johannesburg should be encouraged not only to achieve their stated goals, but also to expand their scope in terms of partners involved, financial resources allocated as well as pursued objectives.

- The main challenge is to act and move forward, but patience is important in this process as well as realism.

- The informal dialogue on partnerships, involving all actors of sustainable development, must continue as a complementary process to the CDS review sessions and keeping in mind that we are just at the beginning of the process.

- Problems and failures must be recognized, faced and addressed in order to implement partnerships in a more successful way. During the course of the Forum the following constraints were identified:

- ✓ weak capacity at local level,
- ✓ lack of decisions and transparency,
- ✓ underdeveloped legislation,
- ✓ weak involvement of private sector,
- ✓ competing pressure to show quick results and the recognition that sustainable development implies a long term strategy,
- ✓ lack of leadership from southern partners.

- Partnerships take advantage of the environment as an opportunity for development and trade. The discussion on partnerships should not be exclusively done in environmental fora. Their beneficial effects, their innovative means should be analyzed and evaluated also in the next discussions in the WTO in Hong Kong, hopefully at the end of this year.

10. This Forum has been the right opportunity where we all brought on the table something that is unique and that we have recognized has to be further developed as an important contribution to a sustainable development.

11. This outcome document of the Forum will be presented during the 12th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-12) in New York, 14-30 April 2004, UN Headquarters.